

HOUSING INSTABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS AMONG RHODE ISLAND CHILDREN

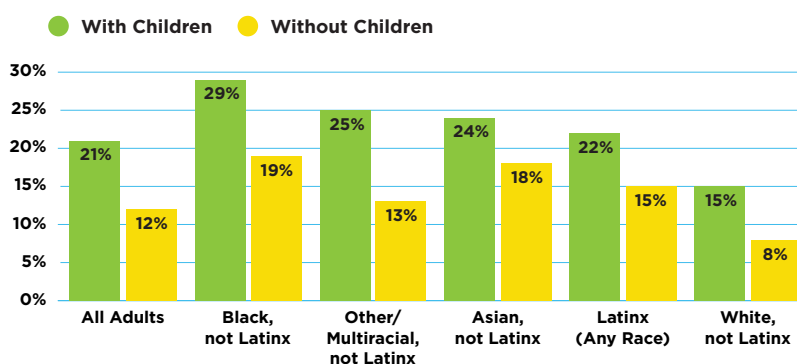
Poor quality, unaffordable, or crowded housing has a negative impact on children's physical health, development, and emotional well-being and on a family's ability to meet their child's basic needs. When housing costs more than a family can afford, children often live in low-quality and overcrowded housing and move frequently, all of which have been linked to lower educational achievement and increased risk of homelessness. When children live in high-quality housing that is safe, affordable, and located in well-resourced, low-poverty neighborhoods, they do better in school and their parents report better mental health.^{1,2}

For many families living in deep poverty, episodes of homelessness are part of a cycle of housing instability that often includes living in housing that is unaffordable and/or unsafe, doubling up with families or friends, and being evicted. For these families, the shortage of housing that is affordable to them is the main reason they become homeless.³ This situation became even more dire due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic hardships faced by families who lost jobs, experienced a loss of income, or were forced to leave their jobs or cut their hours due to the lack of child care or in-person school during the pandemic.^{4,5}

THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON HOUSING STABILITY

- At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, one in five renters in the U.S. reported that they could not keep up with their rent. In Rhode Island, renters continue to struggle with 28% reporting that they could not keep up with their rent from September 15 to October 22, 2021. Nationally, Black families with children continue to face the greatest housing insecurity.^{6,7}

ADULT RENTERS SAYING THEIR HOUSEHOLD IS NOT CAUGHT UP ON RENT, U.S. HOUSEHOLDS



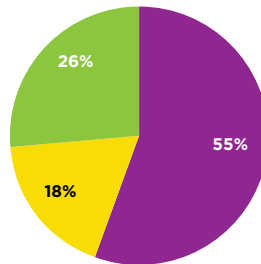
Source: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2021). *Investing in housing vouchers critical to protecting children from hardship, building more equitable future*. Retrieved November 19, 2021, from www.cbpp.org. Based on an analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey data from early August to late September, 2021.

- The *CARES Act*, passed in March 2020, included a provision prohibiting evictions for nonpayment of rent through the end of July 2020. This protection was extended when the Centers for Disease Control instituted its own eviction moratorium, which was in effect until the Supreme Court struck down the moratorium on August 26, 2021, effectively ending eviction protections for families in states like Rhode Island that did not have their own eviction moratoriums.^{8,9,10}
- Both the *CARES Act* and the *American Rescue Plan Act*, passed in March 2021, included funding for rental assistance and funding to help individuals and families experiencing homelessness. In Rhode Island, these funds have been distributed through a variety of programs administered by the United Way of Rhode Island, Rhode Island Housing, and Crossroads Rhode Island. **Rent Relief RI** (<https://www.rihousing.com/rentreliefri/>) will continue to accept applications for assistance through September 2022.^{11,12,13,14}

RHODE ISLAND FAMILIES AWAITING SHELTER

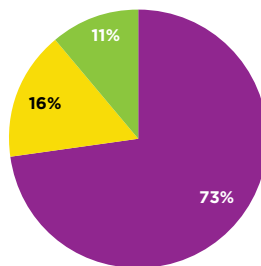
- Shelter is not guaranteed and often not available due to capacity limits, and Rhode Island is not a right to shelter state.¹⁵
- As of November 16, 2021, 1,013 Rhode Islanders were seeking shelter. Almost half (45%) of the people waiting for shelter were in families with children, and 267 or more than one-quarter (26%) were children under the age of 18.^{16,17}
- From October 8 – November 6, 2021, 574 Rhode Islanders slept outside or in their cars for at least one night, and 156 were in families with children. Almost half (44%) of the adults in these families with children had no income. During that 30-day period, 62 children under the age of 18 slept outside or in their family's car for at least one night.¹⁸

RHODE ISLANDERS IN SHELTER QUEUE, NOVEMBER 16, 2021



55% ● **Adults without Children**
18% ● **Adults in Households with Children**
26% ● **Children Under Age 18**
N=1,013

RHODE ISLANDERS WHO SLEPT OUTSIDE OR IN THEIR CARS FOR AT LEAST ONE NIGHT, OCTOBER 8 - NOVEMBER 6, 2021



73% ● **Adults without Children**
16% ● **Adults in Households with Children**
11% ● **Children Under Age 18**
N=574

Source: Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness, Homeless Management Information System. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

RHODE ISLAND'S COORDINATED ENTRY SYSTEM

- Coordinated entry is a nationally recognized process developed to ensure that people experiencing a housing crisis are quickly identified, assessed for, referred, and connected to housing and assistance and that everyone has fair and equal access to housing resources.¹⁹
- In Rhode Island, the Coordinated Entry System is funded by the Consolidated Homeless Fund, the Continuum of Care, and the Emergency Solutions Grants and run by the Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness and Crossroads Rhode Island.²⁰
- The Coordinated Entry System serves Rhode Islanders who are currently homeless or who anticipate becoming homeless within the next 14 days.²¹
- **Families in need of assistance can contact the call center at (401) 277-4316.** Help Center agents will conduct an assessment over the phone and refer families to resources including diversion assistance, shelter, and opportunities to apply for permanent housing. Assistance is available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and Haitian Creole.²²

RHODE ISLAND CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN SHELTERS

- In Rhode Island in 2020, 323 families with 623 children stayed at an emergency homeless shelter, domestic violence shelter, or transitional housing facility in Rhode Island at any point during the year.²³
- Children made up about one quarter (23%) of the people who used emergency homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, and transitional housing in 2020.²⁴
- The average length of stay for families was 131 days in homeless shelters, 98 days in domestic violence shelters, 466 days in transitional housing programs serving homeless families, and 483 days in transitional housing programs serving families who have experienced domestic violence.²⁵
- An annual Point-in-Time count is conducted each year to get a count of people experiencing homelessness on a single winter night. The January 2021 count showed a dramatic increase in people experiencing homelessness, including a 26% increase in households with children (from 121 in 2020 to 153 in 2021).²⁶
- In the United States, 2.5 million children (one in 30) are homeless each year. Families experiencing homelessness often include young adults and young children, and infants are more likely to experience homelessness than any other age group. Black children and families are more likely to experience homelessness than other racial and ethnic groups due to racial discrimination, economic segregation, and systemic racism.^{27,28}

HOMELESSNESS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- For many families, the mismatch between their incomes and the cost of housing is the root cause of their homelessness, but family violence is another major factor. In the U.S. more than 80% of women with children who experience homelessness have experienced domestic violence.²⁹
- Rhode Island's statewide network of domestic violence shelters and advocacy programs provides emergency and support services to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual violence, and stalking.³⁰
- During 2020, Rhode Island's domestic violence network provided services to 9,259 individuals, including 486 children. In 2020, 147 children and 186 adults stayed in domestic violence shelters, 73 children and 54 adults lived in domestic violence transitional housing (longer-term private apartments for victims of domestic violence), 10 families moved into permanent supportive housing, and 42 families accessed Rapid Re-housing.^{31,32}

HOMELESSNESS AND THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

- Parents and caregivers are at increased risk of neglecting or abusing children if they are overwhelmed by multiple risk factors, such as poverty, substance abuse, intergenerational trauma, isolation, or unstable housing.³³
- Lack of stable housing is often a precipitating factor for a family's involvement in the child welfare system, and unstable or inadequate housing can delay family reunification.^{34,35}
- In Rhode Island in 2020, 3% (114) of the 4,029 indicated allegations of child neglect were associated with inadequate food or shelter.³⁶
- Addressing families' housing needs can reduce child neglect and abuse and help families stay together.³⁷

THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS OF HOMELESSNESS

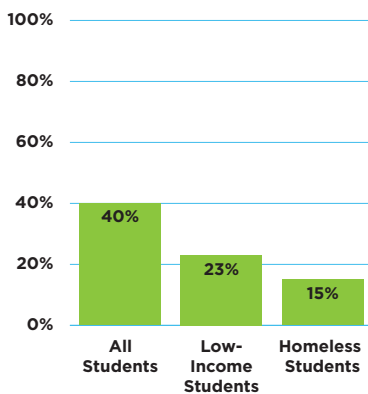
- Homeless children have higher rates of acute and chronic health problems than low-income children who have homes. Compared with their peers, homeless children have four times as many respiratory infections, twice as many ear infections, and five times as many gastrointestinal problems.³⁸
- Children experiencing homelessness go hungry at twice the rate of other children and often have nutritional deficiencies, which can lead to malnutrition, overweight, or obesity.^{39,40}
- Homeless children are at a higher risk of abuse and exposure to violence. This trauma can lead to an increase in developmental delays and emotional distress. When homeless children are exposed to multiple traumatic events, they may have increased levels of anxiety, poor impulse control, or difficulty developing trusting relationships.^{41,42}

SUPPORTING HOMELESS CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS

- Housing instability and homelessness can impact educational outcomes for children. Homeless children are more likely to change schools, be chronically absent from school, and have lower academic achievement than children who have housing.⁴³
- The federal *McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (McKinney-Vento Act)* requires that states identify homeless children, allow them to enroll in school even if they lack required documents, allow them to stay in their “home school,” provide transportation when needed, and provide access to all services and programs that the child is eligible for, including preschool, before- and after-school care, school meals, and services for Multilingual Learners/English Learners.⁴⁴
- The *McKinney-Vento Act* defines a child as homeless if he or she does not have a “fixed, regular and adequate night-time residence.”⁴⁵ During the 2019-2020 school year, Rhode Island public school personnel identified 1,531 children as homeless. Of these children, 66% lived with other families (“doubled up”), 23% lived in shelters, 9% lived in hotels or motels, and 2% were unsheltered. Eleven were unaccompanied homeless youth.⁴⁶
- The federal *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*, which re-authorized *McKinney-Vento* in 2015, strengthens existing provisions for homeless students, guarantees school stability for students starting in preschool, and requires schools to report on student achievement and graduation rates for homeless students.⁴⁷
- The *American Rescue Plan Act* dedicated \$800 million to the identification, enrollment, and school success of children and youth experiencing homelessness, and the *Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER)* Fund includes funds to support the needs of students disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures, including students experiencing homelessness.^{48,49}

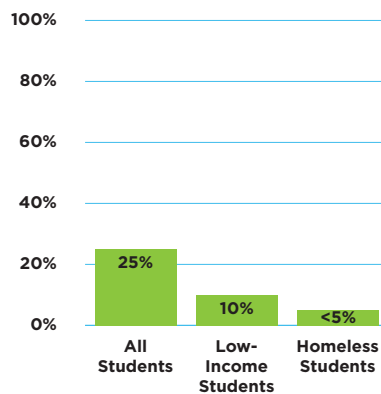
THE EFFECTS OF HOUSING INSTABILITY AND HOMELESSNESS ON CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Third Graders Meeting Expectations on the *RICAS* English Language Arts Assessment, Rhode Island, 2020-2021 School Year



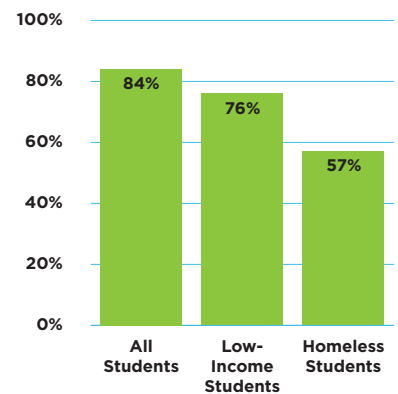
Source: Rhode Island Department of Education. *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2020-2021 school year. Student performance may have been influenced by disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Third Graders Meeting Expectations on the *RICAS* Math Assessment, Rhode Island, 2020-2021 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education. *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2020-2021 school year. Student performance may have been influenced by disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Class of 2020 Four-Year High School Graduation Rates, Rhode Island



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education. Class of 2020.

- Of the 197 Rhode Island students identified as homeless who enrolled in ninth grade in 2016, 57% graduated in four years, 21% dropped out, 3% completed a GED, and 19% were still in school.⁵⁰

**STUDENT STABILITY AND MOBILITY RATES AND STUDENTS IDENTIFIED AS HOMELESS,
BY DISTRICT, 2019-2020 SCHOOL YEAR**

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL ENROLLMENT	# ENROLLED AFTER SEPT. 30	# EXITED BEFORE JUNE 1	STABILITY RATE	MOBILITY RATE	# OF CHILDREN IDENTIFIED AS HOMELESS BY PUBLIC SCHOOL PERSONNEL
Barrington	3,397	66	58	97%	4%	*
Bristol Warren	3,173	67	171	93%	7%	37
Burrillville	2,247	60	77	94%	6%	56
Central Falls	2,878	263	303	82%	19%	73
Chariho	3,238	68	116	94%	6%	12
Coventry	4,548	151	238	92%	8%	74
Cranston	10,475	490	583	91%	10%	72
Cumberland	4,668	168	266	91%	9%	13
East Greenwich	2,595	35	40	97%	3%	*
East Providence	5,251	170	231	93%	8%	31
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,663	35	43	95%	5%	*
Foster	239	*	*	96%	4%	*
Foster-Glocester	1,355	24	45	96%	5%	*
Glocester	555	10	12	96%	4%	*
Jamestown	489	26	27	90%	11%	0
Johnston	3,258	133	206	90%	10%	32
Lincoln	3,211	111	114	93%	7%	20
Little Compton	237	*	*	96%	4%	0
Middletown	2,133	122	155	89%	12%	83
Narragansett	1,278	37	38	94%	6%	*
New Shoreham	135	*	*	96%	5%	0
Newport	2,154	154	164	87%	14%	47
North Kingstown	3,992	117	142	94%	6%	31
North Providence	3,585	174	153	91%	9%	42
North Smithfield	1,666	31	43	96%	4%	0
Pawtucket	8,784	617	747	86%	15%	98
Portsmouth	2,426	74	96	93%	7%	*
Providence	23,836	1,829	2,596	84%	17%	304
Scituate	1,226	31	36	95%	5%	0
Smithfield	2,382	40	56	96%	4%	22
South Kingstown	2,882	68	91	95%	5%	27
Tiverton	1,759	47	73	94%	7%	*
Warwick	8,610	295	442	92%	8%	85
West Warwick	3,629	205	286	88%	13%	37
Westerly	2,648	68	107	94%	7%	39
Woonsocket	6,027	440	643	84%	16%	194
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>9,014</i>	<i>251</i>	<i>419</i>	<i>93%</i>	<i>7%</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>State-Operated Schools</i>	<i>1,786</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>93%</i>	<i>8%</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>UCAP</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>84%</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>0</i>
<i>Four Core Cities</i>	<i>41,525</i>	<i>3,149</i>	<i>4,289</i>	<i>84%</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>669</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>91,104</i>	<i>3,086</i>	<i>4,124</i>	<i>93%</i>	<i>8%</i>	<i>784</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>143,557</i>	<i>6,549</i>	<i>8,931</i>	<i>90%</i>	<i>10%</i>	<i>1,531</i>

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Education, 2019-2020 school year.

Total enrollment is public school enrollment in grades preschool to 12 on October 1, 2019.

*Fewer than 10 students are in this category.

Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These students are counted in the four core cities. Remainder of state, and state totals.

Rhode Island totals for children identified as homeless are not the same as the sum of all of the districts because some students move districts during the school year and are counted as homeless in both districts.

Stability rates measure the number of children who attended the same school the entire school year in a school district. The stability rate is calculated by dividing the number of children enrolled the whole year at the same school in the school district by total enrollment for that school district.⁵¹

Mobility rates are calculated by adding all children who enrolled after September 30 to all children who withdrew before June 1 and dividing by the total enrollment for that district over the course of the year.⁵²

McKinney-Vento Homeless Definition

The McKinney-Vento definition of homelessness includes any child who does not have a "fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." This includes children who are living with other families ("doubled up"), in shelters, living in hotels or motels, and unsheltered.⁵³

SUPPORTING YOUNG CHILDREN EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

- Many homeless families include young, single mothers with young children. Many of these mothers face significant barriers to employment, including low levels of education, lack of employment histories, and unreliable child care. To secure stable employment, these parents need education, job skills, and safe, dependable child care for their children.⁵⁴
- In Rhode Island in 2020, 40% of children who stayed in emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, or transitional housing facilities were under the age of five.⁵⁵
- New Child Care Development Block Grant regulations were issued in 2016. Under these new regulations, homeless children are considered a priority category. Offering priority to families experiencing homelessness can include prioritizing enrollment and waiving copayments for child care.⁵⁶
- Children experiencing homelessness are automatically eligible for Early Head Start and Head Start, federally-funded comprehensive early childhood programs that serve low-income children. These programs provide early education, medical and dental screenings and referrals, nutrition services, mental health services, family engagement activities, and social service referrals for the whole family.⁵⁷ In 2020, Rhode Island Early Head Start programs served 21 children who were homeless and Head Start programs served 12 children.^{58,59}

SUPPORTING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

- There are three primary causes of homelessness among youth and young adults – family conflict, residential instability resulting from foster care and institutional placements, and economic problems.⁶⁰
- National data find that one-third of young adults who had experienced homelessness had been in foster care. Youth who “age out” of foster care without permanent families are more likely to experience homelessness.⁶¹
- Youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) are overrepresented in the homeless youth population, some of whom report being forced out of their homes by parents who disapproved of their sexual orientation or gender identity.⁶²
- In 2018, Rhode Island conducted a Youth Point in Time Count to assess the number and characteristics of youth ages 14 to 24 with experiences of current, former, or potential housing instability or homelessness. The 2018 Point in Time Count identified 173 youth and youth adults experiencing current, former, or potential housing instability, 67 of whom were currently homeless.⁶³
- In 2020, 150 youth or young adults ages 18 to 24 stayed at an emergency shelter, domestic violence shelter, or transitional housing facility, including 42 parenting youth, 31 unaccompanied youth, and 77 youth who were sheltered with their parents. An additional 95 youth ages 13 to 17 received emergency shelter services with their families. From October 8 - November 6, 2021, 53 youth and young adults ages 18 to 24 slept outside for at least one night.⁶⁴
- Family Service of Rhode Island operates a Basic Center Program that is designed to meet the immediate needs of homeless and runaway youth. The program provides emergency host homes, food, clothing, and counseling services to youth up to age 18 for up to 21 days.⁶⁵

YOUTH HOMELESS DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM

- In 2021, the federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) agency, awarded Rhode Island \$3.4 million in Youth Homeless Demonstration Program (YHDP) funds. These funds are designed to support Rhode Island in developing and implementing a coordinated approach to preventing and ending youth homelessness that centers the voice, vision, and agency of youth.⁶⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Prevent evictions**, which disproportionately affect Black and Latino households and households led by single mothers by offering free legal representation to tenants and by instituting a statewide eviction moratorium on nonessential residential evictions during a state of emergency.
- **Reduce the effects of evictions** by sealing eviction records during eviction proceedings and when the case is found in tenant's favor so families do not have eviction filings on their record, which can make it difficult to find a landlord willing to rent to them in the future.
- **Address systemic racism and enforce laws barring housing discrimination** based on race, ethnicity, immigration status, gender, sexuality, gender identity, or lawful source of income (including a housing subsidy).
- **Reduce unnecessary barriers to subsidized housing** by ensuring that requirements to rent in public housing and private developments that receive federal rental subsidies are no more stringent than federal requirements.
- **Continue to connect families to rent and utility assistance** available through the Rhode Island Rent Relief program. Provide outreach to families through homeless education liaisons in schools, social service agencies, and other community-based organizations.
- **Offer more housing vouchers and target them effectively.**
Apply for available vouchers that target families involved in the child welfare system and youth exiting foster care. Use state funds to fill in gaps in federal resources by providing vouchers to youth and families who do not meet the HUD definition of literal homelessness but who are doubled up or in dangerous or untenable living arrangements.
- **Build more affordable housing** using funds from the housing bond, dedicated funding stream for affordable housing that was created by an increase in the state real estate transfer tax, and *American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)* federal funds.
- **Address barriers to affordable housing development in local building codes.**
- **Guarantee immediate access to emergency shelter or funds for brief hotel stays for families in crisis.**
- **Provide support to young children and students experiencing homelessness in school and prioritize them for supportive and academic services.** Improve identification of students experiencing homelessness by developing stronger relationships between schools and outreach workers and social service programs that touch families in crisis. Identify a homeless education liaison in every school. Provide priority access to Early Intervention, early childhood education, before and after school programs, summer learning programs, and counseling and financial support needed to access higher education.
- **Provide housing and other economic supports to youth over age 18 exiting the foster care system.** Ensure that the state's Voluntary Extension of Care program is meeting the housing needs of youth aging out of foster care and extend this assistance to age 26.
- **Center the voices of youth and parents experiencing homelessness in policy decisions.**
- **Fill the position of Deputy Secretary of Commerce and Housing** to oversee housing initiatives and develop a statewide housing plan.
- **Address the state's long-term underinvestment in affordable housing** by prioritizing affordable housing development and preservation and strategies for addressing the immediate homeless crisis when making decisions about how to invest federal *American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)* funds.



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